

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind
Public Forum
August 2, 2007
St. Louis, MO

Council Members Present: Clay Berry, Phyllis Lovett, Beverly Kaskadden, Debbi Head, Russ McCampbell, Brian Wekamp, Ceil Callahan, James Pelfrey, Jim Surchaski, Lawrence Luck and Kim Gerlt – liaison

RSB Staff Present: Mark Laird, Mike Merrick, Ben Elliott and Nancy Goebel

Public Present: Denny Huff – Rehab Engineer with Gateway for the Blind and his driver Steve, Tom Armstrong, Bev Armstrong – Missouri Council of the Blind, Sheryl Schultz, Leslie Cauley – Alphapointe

Bev Armstrong said that she has received calls from either schools or social workers in schools about children who are in need of adaptive equipment or something to take notes with. MCB had helped through the youth services program but she is wondering what age does RSB start helping children who are mainstreamed and does RSB help them to obtain adaptive equipment. Debbi Head explained the IEP process and if a child is in need of adaptive equipment it is the school districts responsibility. She also explained how equipment follows the child to other schools. Mark explained how RSB provides services and how RSB counselors meet with the school personnel to find the needs of the child and determine the post school needs of the child. RSB is working on a transition process right now.

Sherry Schultz said that blind people are like all other people, they want to acquire the skills so that they can get a job and support themselves like everyone else. Her son has been through rehabilitation services and is a vendor technician for computers. He worked really hard to get his contract but he gets no work. Sherry wants to know what the secret is, is there another step or some protocol that he hasn't been told about. His rates are very competitive and he is very good at what he does but he gets no jobs.

Mark Laird said that anytime you are awarded a contract, on the contract award itself there is a disclaimer that you are not guaranteed that the state will use the contract. There is no preferential treatment of contracts in the state. In terms of provider of services RSB is bound to use client choice to a great extent in terms of who is a provider and which contractor is asked to provide a service. A comparable example, Clay operates the only in-state community rehabilitation program for the blind (Alphapointe). RSB has a total of 5 contractors. In some ways it would be nice to give preference to in-state contractors but we simply can't; we have to share knowledge of all of our different contractors with our clients. In some cases Alphapointe doesn't provide the particular service the client needs and that impacts which contractor the client is offered in terms of, here are your choices of contractors that provide that particular service. Our clients should always be

afforded an intimate look at all of the contractors to determine which one would meet their needs the best.

Sherry said that a rehabilitation client, someone who has gone through rehabilitation for services, doesn't know any of these contractors, they have to be led, someone has to be leading them because they don't know the contractors. Sherry knows that when her son was getting services through RSB he was never given a choice of who was going to help him, they just said we're sending such and such a person out. The other thing, and Sherry thinks with a lot of state things, especially with the openness of government, it seems that it would behoove RSB to use contractors that are not so expensive. There are some contractors RSB is using that are double the rate of others and those are the ones that are getting most of the work. Sherry doesn't feel that is a wise use of her tax-paying dollars.

Mark Laird said there is a new website that is an accountability porthole that you can log into and type in and search the database of any vendor that the state uses and find out how much money the state has paid a particular vendor for a fiscal year. Under this administration they are taking all kinds of efforts to be open in terms of how tax dollars are being utilized.

Leslie Cauley, Alphapointe, asked if the vendors have the opportunity to go around to different RSB offices to introduce themselves and talk about the specific services they can provide to the client as a way for the counselors to make them familiar with their services. Mark Laird said RSB encourages vendors to go around to the district offices, show your face, introduce your services and market the particular product or service that you have. There is staff turn over and there may be brand new counselors that may not be familiar with services of a contractor. There was discussion about consumer choice and marketing a contractor's service to the district offices in order to make the counselors aware of the contractor's services. Lawrence suggested that Mark Laird speak with the district supervisors who can speak with the office support staff.

Jim Surcharski spoke briefly of Dr Heskett's study that RSB develop a shared vision on services for blind students and adults in Missouri. There will be a meeting in August and at the next Council meeting they will be able to provide an executive summary of the meeting. The focus is to identify what is done well and where the gaps are and what a game plan is for closing those gaps.

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

August 3, 2007

St Louis, Missouri

Members Present: Lawrence Luck, Donna Borgmeyer, Bev Kaskadden, Debbi Head, Clay Berry, Phyllis Lovett, Ceil Callahan, James Pelfrey, Russ McCampbell, Brian Wekamp. Kim Gerlt - Liaison

RSB Staff Present: Mark Laird, Ben Elliott, Naomi Soule, Mike Merrick

Public Present: Leslie Calley - Alphapointe

Minutes - Motion by Russ McCampbell to approve minutes seconded by James Pelfrey. Motion passed unanimously.

RSB St Louis Offices

Ben Elliott – St. Louis North District Supervisor. This office is responsible for clients who live in parts of St. Louis County and St. Louis City, St. Charles, Lincoln, Pike, Warren and Montgomery Counties. The office consists of three Rehabilitation Teachers, three Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, one Clerk IV, one Orientation and Mobility Specialist and three clerical staff. The Rehabilitation Teachers are planning to begin group teaching where consumers are located in certain geographical location and the teachers will go to a certain site where clients with certain needs will come in. It is hoped that this will utilize time more efficiently. There will be group and individualized teaching offered at these sessions. Ben is also the Children's Specialist and said that the St. Louis Metro area has the best program for kids. The Special School District has stepped up to the plate and Ben has seen quite a few additions to the staff in outlying counties such as St. Charles County.

Naomi Soule – St. Louis South District Office – This office covers parts of St. Louis County and St. Louis City, Jefferson, Franklin, Washington and Crawford Counties. There are three Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, two Rehabilitation Teachers, one Orientation and Mobility Instructor, four Rehabilitation Assistants, one who supports the BEP area supervisors who are both housed in this district office and one Employment Specialist who covers the Eastern part of the state. The largest concentration of consumers is in Jefferson County. Something new that the district office is doing is holding job clubs. St. Louis staff are also trying to work with United Way on the 211 initiative where people can call a number and get referrals to agencies when in crisis. This will be up and running in November. The district office has been involved in transportation issues in St. Louis and has been able to get the federal transit administration back in town and has worked really closely with Washington, D.C. about accessibility issues in the area to make sure the needs of passengers who are blind are taken into consideration. Naomi and Jane Thompson serve on the Metro ADA committee. Naomi wants to possibly put together something to see about getting more

transportation for individuals in areas where transportation isn't available because this seems to be the biggest obstacle for employment. A lot of companies have been coming in to the district office and demonstrating a lot of products, which Naomi feels is really good so that counselors are aware of the different things available. Naomi does see an increase in the older adult population with referrals coming from nursing homes, assisted living and friends. Naomi said they are also getting referrals from people from other countries who speak different languages. Naomi talked about how they have had a lot of success with consumers being employed through Logan Chiropractic. This is an excellent 5 year program and is very in depth and very successful. Massage therapist is also another area where a lot of people are working. St. Louis North and South do work together. Naomi said that St. Louis South is looking at having a group training session in Cuba to try it and see how it goes and see how successful it is for RSB.

There was discussion about issues with public transportation in the St. Louis area. Naomi said that the metro has been cited for FTA violations. FTA was brought into town based on consumer complaints. Issues are transfer points; if someone is dropped off and the person is to catch a bus or call a ride, the call a ride might not stop at the same place. Also at transfer points there are lots of busses that come by and how is an individual to know where to go to catch the correct bus. Safety of individuals at the transfer points is also an issue. The FTA was in town last week and the individual ended up getting pneumonia and was in the hospital in St. Louis and will return at the end of October. Naomi said they have had meetings with top officials. Metro does not agree with the FTA's findings and has written a response to that effect.

Electronic Case Management – Mark Laird said the RFP for the Case Management System went out today and the pre-bid conference will be August 21, 2007. The pre-bid conference is where interested bidders can ask basic questions about the RFP. The pre-bid conference is done through Office of Administration, and a committee of people, including the person who is doing the buying and those who developed the RFP will be at the table answering questions. RSB will be there to answer the technical questions and some of the conference may be over the phone. Keith Roderick is the project manager and has been phenomenal on this project and has done a great job keeping the project moving.

Director's Report

Mark Laird gave the RSB Director's Report. RSB is on target to easily meet projected closure requirements for FFY07.

State Plan and Appointments - Mike Merrick and Mark Laird had a conference call with RSA about the state plan and one issue that came up is that there is no fully constituted or fully formed Council. RSA required that by September the Council must be fully constituted or RSB has to give an assurance that by the end of FFY2008 the Council will be fully constituted. Mark spoke with Janel Luck, FSD Division Director and had a meeting Jim Uffman who is the Associate Director of the Department. Jim Uffman wants Mark and the Council to submit names of vacant positions and positions where there hadn't been an official appointment and names of suitable applicants so that

Jim could take it to the appointing board, hopefully to help move the appointments forward. Mark pulled together a couple of names for the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, which is currently vacant. Council members should help get names of applicants to Mark. Ceil Callahan, Clay Berry, Phyllis Lovett, and Donna Borgmeyer have not yet been appointed. MPACT representative Mary Kay Savage was appointed but has never shown up.

Terms as RSB knows them are as follows:

- State Workforce Investment is completely vacant. This recommendation comes from the Governor's office.
- Representative of an individual who is blind, has multiple disabilities and has difficulty representing him or herself and or is unable due to disabilities to represent him or herself is vacant.

RSB made a list of the current membership with the initial appointment and the projected appointments following. Based on an RSA technical circular, if you get appointed to a partial term to complete someone's term that is your first term and you can only be appointed to one more term.

- Mary Kay Savage was appointed 2003 to 2005 and should be on her second term from 2005- 2008. Mary Kay is the MPACT representative.
- Russ McCampbell was appointed in 2003 to 2005 on the first appointment, second should be 8-21-05 to 8-21-08. Russ represents business industry and labor.
- Debbi Head's initial appointment was from 2001 to 2002, technically second should have been 2002 to 2005. Debbie represents business industry and labor.
- John Wunder's initial term is from 2001 to 2002, his second term should have ended in 2005.
- Stan Grimsley's first term was from 2001 to 2004 his second term should expire 8-21-07. Stan represents business, industry and labor.

Three replacements will be needed in the business industry and labor category.

Current former applicants or recipients are:

- Ruby Polk whose initial term was 2000 to 2002, her second term should have expired in 2005.
- Beverly Kaskadden's initial appointment was 2003 to 2005 and second term should expire in August, 2008.
- James Pelfrey's initial term was 2000 to 2002, second term ended in 2005.

Education

- Jim Surcharski 2003 to 2004, second term should expire 8-21-07. Jim represents the state education agency.

Disability Advocacy Group

- Brian Wekamp's initial term was 2004 to 2005 and second appointment should be thru 2008.
- Lawrence Luck initial appointment is 2001 to 2004 and the second term should have been from 2004 to August 21, 2007
- Clay has never been appointed and would represent the community rehab program.
- Phyllis Lovett would fill an advocacy group vacancy.

Terms are for three years unless you are appointed to fill out the remainder of a term for someone.

Council needs four to five names of current or past consumers for Mark to take forward which will still leave Debbi, Lawrence, Stan, John's positions that still need to be filled. At next meeting remaining members whose terms are expiring will be discussed. Please get names and contact information to Mark and Kim.

Self-Employment - Mark discussed self-employment closures and how the whole closures in this category need to increase to the mid 40's. In 2006 RSB closed more than over half of the other blind agencies. There was discussion about the difficulty in self-employment some being the difficulty in writing a loan worthy business plan. Keith Roderick is writing an RFP for contracting self-employment consultation. Mark will get the list of self-employment closures with types of jobs and how many jobs and Kim will attach to minutes.

***Addition:** This is the information the Council wanted on RSB's self-employment closures so far as job retention cases. To get an actual count of cases that service provided resulted in retention of a specific job would have to have a hard count, which is time consuming. Districts you might remember are: Kansas City North, Mid Mo, St Louis North, Southeast, Southwest, St. Louis South and Kansas City South. Employment at application codes are: 01 employment without supports in an integrated setting, 03 is self-employment, 07 is employment with supports in integrated setting or supported employment. Now the caveat that I will inject in the file that lists client employment status at opening/application is; At application a person may be still employed but on a medical leave of absence so not working or they may loose their job after application before our intervention services begin and we end up helping them prepare for a different job or they may be employed but underemployed and they come to use for advancement in their employment situation. These would not necessarily be job retention cases in the strictest sense. At this time we do not track, nor does the federal 911 reporting form track job retention in the sense of tracking did services result in assisting you in retaining the job you were in at application.*

RSB Audit - RSB is due for a statewide single audit from the State Auditor's office. There will be an entrance meeting to find what the auditors want to look at. Mark Laird

and Kevin Faust will participate in this meeting. The intent is full and open cooperation with the aim being to improve RSB. Lawrence would like feedback along the way.

RSB Deputy Director Position – Mark has nothing to report on filling the deputy director position. Mark has met with Janel several times to discuss recommendations on the process and qualifications for the position. Lawrence told Mark that he would be interested at a high level/finalist stage having a courtesy opportunity to see the data about the applicants or to speak with Janel or to have lunch with the candidate. Lawrence knows that it's Janel's process and decision.

Standard and Indicators - For the first time ever, RSB passed all standards and indicators for 2006. For rehabilitation rate, RSB is sixth out of 24 blind agencies. RSB is ninth in terms of the number of people who went into competitive employment with at least minimum wage. RSB is fourth in terms of the ratio of earnings by clients to state average earnings. RSB is eleventh in terms of number of people who exit and list their own income as primary source of support. There are 10 other agencies that are bigger than Missouri RSB and only nine other agencies closed more than Missouri RSB. RSB ranked very high in all standards and indicators. Staff deserve all the credit for RSB's success.

Budget - A couple of years ago RSB was probably overspending on program dollars. Changes have been made and staff were asked to be more responsible; they did that and then some and now RSB is sitting good. We are now able to take a few more risks on individuals that RSB might not have been able to before.

State Plan – Feds informed RSB a couple of weeks ago that they would rather have a plan that is more like a strategic plan. Mike Merrick said RSA was very straightforward and said that RSB's state plan meets criteria on past plans but they decided they want to do things different and have the plan include the agency's vision and direction and realistic plans to improve operations. This is a change from past plans where RSB satisfied the requirements in order to continue to receive federal funding. RSA says that they will provide the money anyway, but the plan should give an idea where there are weak points and where can RSB go to make things better. Vast majority of attachments were okay but when it came to subject of priorities and goals and strategies to achieve, RSB is going back to the drawing board. RSA is particularly interested in needs assessment and service needs of the state. Mike sent an email to Lawrence and said the planning committee is going to have to work on this and a report has to be produced and sent to RSA that they can approve by the end of September for the fiscal year. Mark and Mike will talk about the basic results from the review of the statistics and talk about what the goals of the state plan should be and have the council discuss and give input that will give guidance and then go through the planning committee to develop and implement the plan.

First Priority/Goal - RSB has is to increase use and efficiency of supported employment. There is a problem/failure here. We don't serve many clients in this area and not many services are provided. This is a valuable service for those who need it. If you look at

cases in this area, those individuals who need this level of service can only be successful through supported employment. Supported employment is competitive employment with long-term supports: that can mean someone has to be with an employee every minute they are on the job or someone may only visit them once or twice a month. This is competitive because it's integrated into the community and it has to pay at or above minimum wage. The goal is measurable and a number can be set and can be worked toward.

Second Priority/Goal – Increase the number of employment outcomes through the use of transition services. Transition is the group of services that RSB provides in conjunction with school districts to move a young person through the transition from school age to work, independent living, or post secondary education leading to work. There is a group of individuals working on developing a policy/ process for how RSB should do transition. There are definitions in the Rehabilitation Act that give guidance. Some of the things that RSB is looking at are; 1) how to identify students who meet criteria that are eligible and need services; 2) at what point is it appropriate to open a VR case; 3) how to identify within our caseload who is and is not a transition student.

Third Priority/Goal - To increase the rehabilitation rate of applicants who come to RSB unemployed. If people come to RSB already employed, RSB is historically good at retaining employment with a rehabilitation rate of 93%. The rate for people who come to RSB unemployed because they are students is 56%, if they are unemployed for other reasons, it is 64%. 208 out of 253 closures were people who came to RSB unemployed for other reasons. The largest number of people who leave services came to RSB unemployed and have the lowest rehabilitation rate. How many of the 231 were job retentions will be included with the minutes.

***Addition:** During FY2006, RSB recorded 246 Status 26 (employment) closures. Of the 246, 151 were coded as having been employed, self-employed or in Supported Employment at the time of application. We cannot verify if they retained the same job or got a new one, only that they were employed at the time of application*

Fourth Priority/Goal - Outreach to un-served and underserved populations with a measurable increase in the number of applications, minorities particularly, and minority closures. RSB failed this a couple of years because there wasn't enough minorities exiting the system. If there isn't a set number exiting the system you will fail the standard.

Mike and Mark will continue to work on the plan and as it becomes formalized they will contact the planning committee and keep them up to date. They will bring the planning committee for review as needed before the October 1 deadline. Russ discussed Dr. Heskett's study and offered suggestions that RSB could reference from the Blind Task Force's review of transition as well as PR suggestions.

Low Incidence – Low incidence will fall into the strategies that were previously discussed, work experience, on the job training, supportive employment, etc. RSB will

continue to firm up policies on these. Low incidence is low usage strategies, placement and service strategies such as cooperative work, on the job training, job placement, etc. that are more rarely used by a counselor working with a client.

Surveys- There was a brief review of the surveys that were returned. It was decided that some questions regarding gaining employment on the Status 26 survey will be moved to the end of the survey with the wording if you were employed before your latest case with RSB you are finished with the survey, otherwise please complete the remaining questions.

Discussion of the Shared Vision Summit – Russ McCampbell will be moderating/facilitating the meeting. Lawrence Luck, Clay Berry, Mark Laird, Mike Merrick and Debbi Head will be attending. This is a joint project with RSB and School for the Blind. 45 to 50 agencies have been invited to attend the summit. There are going to be about six or seven small group discussions. The meeting will be at the Missouri School for the Blind. It is hoped that this is going to be a beginning of real shared vision to be held annually. The goal this time is to collect information for the development of an action plan and to look at services that are provided by each one of the groups. The event will take place August 13 and 14, 2007.

Discussion of Consumer Groups – This was abandoned after several attempts to put together the meetings so it was decided that each consumer group would be invited to the Shared Vision Summit.

Supportive Employment – This will be dealt with in the new strategies of the state plan.

Randolph Sheppard Program – Terry Smith, Director of Tennessee's combined VR agency has communicated with Larry Branson and Keith Roderick and has sent out surveys. He has not made his first in-person visit but that is still in the planning stage. His steps are spelled out in the contract and he has taken the steps outlined in the contract. This will be added to the agenda for the November meeting.

Transition Program Study Update – Falls in to strategic goals that will be addressed in the revisions on the state plan. This will be added to the November agenda.

Old Business

Children's Vision Summit – Russ expressed appreciation of consumer groups helping with funding and that RSB provided a lot of the funding. As far as next year's Children's Summit, Mike Fester had said before he left that he was okay with RSB contributing each year. The Summit for next year has been turned over to the committee and task force. There is a meeting next week. The Blind Task Force voted to hold the Summit as an annual event.

State Call Center – There may be three people in some phase of this that are either in training or are on the job. Jim Brinkmann is working with this. There was talk about

having a fully accessible training station that is funded and set up and that could be maintained.

Alphapointe -Revenue offered an RFP for a tax collection center and Alphapointe is going to be the agency that trains the blind employees.

New Business

Consumer Choice – It was suggested that RSB give a presentation about how informed consumer choice and the choice of contractors to provide services works, including the role of the VRC in this process. This will be added to November's agenda.

National SRC Conference Call – Pearl VanZant organized the conference call. There was discussion about training materials for new SRC members, appointment issues that all states are currently having, One-Stop workforce development boards and other issues that all of the states are experiencing. The next call is scheduled for Monday, August 6th, 2007.

November Meeting Agenda Items

Electronic Case Management

Randolph Sheppard Program Update

Transition Study Program Update

Discussion of Summit

Four State Regional Summit

Consumer Choice – RSB to discuss how they provide consumer choice in connection with the selection of vendors

Child Support Call Center